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C O N F I D E N T I A L THE HAGUE 000673

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/06/2019  
TAGS: PREL PGOV NATO AF NL  
SUBJECT: NETHERLANDS/AFGHANISTAN: VIEW FROM THE PRIME  
MINISTER'S OFFICE

REF: A. THE HAGUE 663  
1B. THE HAGUE 595

Classified By: POL/ECON COUNSELOR ANDREW MANN for reasons 1.4 (b & d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: The Dutch are unlikely to make a decision on post-2010 Afghanistan deployment until March of next year.  
END SUMMARY.

12. (C/NF) Pol/Econ Counselor met with Jeroen de Graaf, political advisor to Dutch Prime Minister Balkenende, Nov. 6 and reviewed internal discussions on continued Dutch engagement in Afghanistan. De Graaf noted Deputy Prime Minister/Finance Minister/Labor Party leader Wouter Bos keeps his cards close to the vest during Cabinet discussions, but usually provides some indication of areas for compromise. On the issue of the Dutch staying militarily in Uruzgan after 2010 however, he is unbending. He has told the PM, "no, no, no" and is willing to bring down the government and take the issue to the people in an election. He feels the Labor Party compromised previously in supporting the decisions to undertake the Uruzgan "lead nation" mission and then to extend the mission until 2010. Consequently, the party has suffered in the polls. He does not plan to make those "mistakes" again.

13. (C/NF) De Graaf indicated Development Minister Koenders and other Labor officials and MPs would likely support some sort of mission in Uruzgan. Bos and other Labor MPs will not. De Graaf said Bos orchestrated the recent parliamentary debate on the resolutions calling for the Cabinet to be mindful of parliamentary opposition to a military mission in Uruzgan (reftels). Bos sat in the Parliament's cafeteria, instructing the Labor MPs by texting on what to say and do.

14. (C/NF) The only way the PM thinks the Labor Party can be turned around is by pressure from its constituents. The PM's party, the Christian Democrats (CDA), is intimating to the NGOs working on development in Uruzgan their programs might have to be shut down if the Dutch leave the province. Since recent surveys have shown marked improvements in public health, agricultural production and education standards in Uruzgan since the Dutch took over "lead nation" status, the NGOs are anxious to continue their work. The PM's office is hoping they will raise their concerns to senior Labor officials and urge them to stay the course. The PM is also granting interviews to selected publications to talk about Dutch successes on the ground and positive developments in

Uruzgan caused by Dutch development assistance.

¶ 15. (C/NF) De Graaf admitted these tactics would take time. The Ministry of Defense is under instructions to determine the last possible date for a Cabinet decision. De Graaf warned the Prime Minister did not think the Cabinet would be able to reach consensus on any sort of follow-on mission for Uruzgan before the municipal elections in early March 2010. If a decision was required beforehand, it would be "no." Afghanistan is not an issue of concern to the other party in the current three-party coalition, the Christian Union (CU). De Graaf anticipates the CU will follow the Labor Party's lead in any Cabinet decision (NOTE: as it did in the recent parliamentary debate).

¶ 16. (C/NF) Pol/Econ Counselor reviewed generally some of the recent efforts the U.S. had taken to engage the Labor leadership and opposition MPs (visits/meetings by USNATO Perm Rep Amb. Daalder, Gen. McChrystal, Gen. Petraeus; NSA Gen. Jones pull aside with Bos at G20 in Pittsburgh) as well as planned engagement (SRAP Holbrooke phone call to Koenders; Ambassador call on Bos). De Graaf appreciated our low-key strategy and thought they were the best approach on this delicate issue.

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